

98-84332-5

McLaren, Lady

“Better and happier.”

London

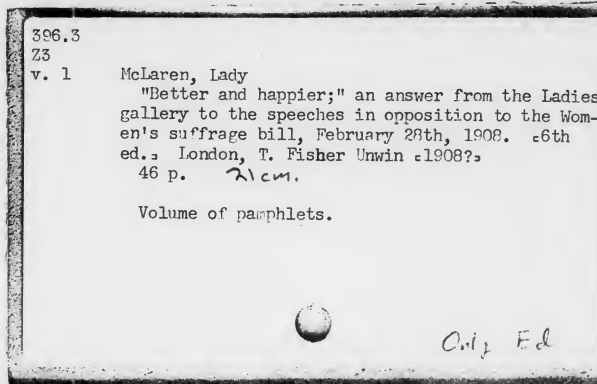
[1908?]

98-84332-5
MASTER NEGATIVE #

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
PRESERVATION DIVISION

BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

ORIGINAL MATERIAL AS FILMED - EXISTING BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD



RESTRICTIONS ON USE: Reproductions may not be made without permission from Columbia University Libraries.

TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm

REDUCTION RATIO: 11:1

IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (11A) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 2-11-98

INITIALS: PB

TRACKING # :

30837

FILMED BY PRESERVATION RESOURCES, BETHLEHEM, PA.

96 12
SIXTH EDITION.

"BETTER AND HAPPIER."

*An Answer from the Ladies' Gallery to the Speeches
in Opposition to the Women's Suffrage Bill,
February 28th, 1908.*

BY

LADY McLAREN.

*"I believe that the country would be made better and happier by
the admission of women to the franchise."*

The Right Hon. H. J. GLADSTONE, M.P.,
Home Secretary, in the House of Commons, February 28th, 1908.

PRICE SIXPENCE NET.

LONDON :
T. FISHER UNWIN,
ADELPHI TERRACE, W.C.

39613
23
12

SIXTH EDITION.

"BETTER AND HAPPIER."

*An Answer from the Ladies' Gallery to the Speeches
in Opposition to the Women's Suffrage Bill,
February 28th, 1908.*

BY

LADY McLAREN.

*"I believe that the country would be made better and happier by
the admission of women to the franchise."*

The Right Hon. H. J. GLADSTONE, M.P.,
Home Secretary, in the House of Commons, February 28th, 1908.

PRICE SIXPENCE NET.

LONDON :
T. FISHER UNWIN,
ADELPHI TERRACE, W.C.

"BETTER AND HAPPIER."

*An Answer from the Ladies' Gallery to the Speeches in Opposition
to the Women's Suffrage Bill, February 28th, 1908.*

The debate on the Women's Suffrage Bill, introduced this year by Mr. Stanger, was marked by a more generous tone in the speeches of both friends and opponents than any previous discussion of the subject in the House of Commons. But this greater kindness was probably due to the fact that all parties felt that the Bill, from which women had hoped so much, was already dead. Its little corpse, lying evidently cold and lifeless on the floor of the House, was a pathetic object, rousing the pity even of opponents, and giving to the debate a sense of unreality and a funereal gloom. Mr. Stanger, in his very able speech, announced the fact that even if it were carried by a triumphant majority it could go no further, and that next session everything would have to be begun again. Still, our warmest thanks are due, not only to Mr. Stanger, but to Mr. Acland, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Pike Pease, Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Kettle, Mr. Snowden, Mr. Brodie, and Mr. Atherley Jones, who spoke in favour, and to our other friends in the House for their untiring efforts in the Lobby. If in this paper I do not refer further to them individually, or do more than express the gratitude women feel towards those who helped them on this occasion, it is because my object is to answer the arguments advanced against the measure.

MR. CATHCART WASON'S OBJECTIONS.

The Member who moved the rejection of the Bill was Mr. Cathcart Wason—a fortunate selection in the interest of those who desired the Bill to pass. Mr. Wason is as unreasonably opposed to Women's Suffrage as he is to motor-cars. It must have been evident to those who heard his speech that he is hardly qualified, either by careful study of the problem or by sympathetic feelings, to enjoy power to legislate for women on questions which intimately concern them, such as marriage, inheritance, divorce, guardianship of children or right to labour. He does not seem either able or willing to study such intricacies, and I am sure there could scarcely have been a Member of the House who did not feel some movement of pity towards us women, who are obliged to leave our interests in the councils of the nation to be dealt with by such rather confused minds as that of the Member for Orkney and Shetland. The day has fortunately gone by when little jokes and ungallant stories have power to move the Ladies' Gallery, for women know well that there are men in the House quick to resent these things, and that the worse the joke, the more unchivalrous the suggestion, the more the speech tells in favour of the Bill. Mr. Wason's speech was not, however, altogether devoid of serious argument. His first point was that out of 670 election addresses issued by Members of Parliament — of whom 420 were pledged to support Women's Suffrage — only 61 made any allusion to the subject. Now those who have drawn up election addresses are well aware that such documents are composed as a menu of dishes likely to be particularly palatable to the electors. As no women are electors, and as every constituency, however favourable to the claims of women, must contain some men who are opposed, a few votes might be

lost if Women's Suffrage were thrust to the front. It is therefore a doubtful advantage to our friendly candidates to include Women's Suffrage in their election addresses, since to "let sleeping dogs lie" is an axiom of electioneering art. I have never asked any members favourable to us to make such a sacrifice, feeling that their presence in the House is of the first importance, not only for their sakes but for ours. Those sixty-one who, setting aside this consideration, yet included the claims of women in their election addresses to male constituents, performed an act of rare generosity and self-sacrifice for which we can never be sufficiently grateful; and it is a striking proof of the desire of Members of Parliament to help us that so many as sixty-one should have taken this course.

Mr. Wason then objected that if this Bill were passed it would tempt men to create faggot votes by giving property to women, and so increase the evils of plural voting. Men are not usually in any great hurry to hand over property to women; but however this may be, the fact that *men* may make an unjust use of their powers by creating faggot votes, is a reason rather for restraining the power of men than for refusing power to women. It would be better for Mr. Wason to employ his ingenuity in devising some scheme by which the propensities of his faggot-makers might be counteracted, than to urge the House of Commons to vote against a measure which gives a small share of representation to qualified women.

Another argument was that "it would mean the giving to women the right to sit in the House, and to occupy any office in the House, even that of Mr. Speaker." I find no mention of any such provisions

in the Bill, which merely qualifies women householders and property owners, and says nothing of any other privileges. It is illogical to refuse one measure of justice because at some other time other privileges may be asked for, which, if they are asked for, the House has power to refuse. It was once said of a Government that its guiding principle was *la peur*; but the guiding principle of the House of Commons on this subject seems to be *la peur de la peur*. When women ask for admission to the House of Commons—when they find, if ever, a constituency mainly composed of men who consider a woman the fittest representative of their interests—it will be time to decide whether women should, or should not, be admitted to seats in the House. As that time is far away, such an argument is not very effective against the moderate measure of justice to women which Mr. Stanger has brought forward.

THE ARGUMENT FROM "PHYSICAL FORCE."

Mr. Wason, however, did not sit down without airing the old argument about physical force. "What contribution did women make to force?" Mr. Wason asked. "It was force that ruled the world." On this point I shall be pleased to enlighten him. Society depends, not only on the force of men, but on the force of women also, and without woman's force evidently all things would come to a stand, and life cease to exist upon the planet. Nothing is more curious than the blindness of men to the fact that it is the physical force of women that keeps the world moving to-day. I have heard a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons declare, by a strange hallucination, that women had no physical force at all, and I believe that this opinion is quite common. And yet this Member had that morning

ordered a number of women in his household to get out of bed at dawn while he was comfortably sleeping. He was roused from his slumbers by the knock of a woman; his hot water was heated and brought to him by a woman; he donned a shirt that a woman had made and that a woman had newly washed, and he put on a collar she had ironed; he dressed himself in clothes which a woman had brushed and which another woman had probably done much to make; he went down to eat the breakfast which a woman had prepared, and walked out to go to the House of Commons over steps which a woman had knelt to scrub. From the cradle to the grave, that man depended for his comforts on the physical force of women. They had nursed him in infancy, washed all the plates and dishes he had used, tidied away all the disorder he had created, and prepared at least nine-tenths of the food he had consumed. And yet he was not aware that the greater part of all the dirty, disagreeable, monotonous and ill-paid work of the whole of this country is performed by the physical force of women, and proclaimed to an applauding House that women have no physical force at all!

Now, it may be true that a woman is not so strong as a man, but how much less strong is she? Is she two-thirds as strong, or three-quarters as strong, as an average man? I have heard it stated that in low social circles a vigorous woman with a hot frying-pan is a match for any man armed only with his fists. I admit, however, that this argument is not a sympathetic one. Perhaps Mr. Wason can in his wisdom answer me this question: If it takes 670 Members of Parliament to represent the physical force of 20,103,408 men, how many members does he give us to represent the physical force of 21,356,313 women? Does he think that the number of women who would be enfranchised by Mr. Stanger's Bill—

which is roughly calculated as about one woman voter to every five or six men voters—is more than the physical force of 21,356,313 women is entitled to on a representation calculated on the basis of physical force? Or again, if physical force alone is entitled to representation, a fair way is to impose a test by which women and men alike are to be judged. Any test of strength whatever which would qualify a sufficient number of men would be one under which many young and vigorous women could get a vote; and if I personally did not have one, my disfranchisement would be shared by the halt, the lame, the aged and the sick of the male sex, besides all the whipper-snappers who now so triumphantly lord it over us. If to this physical test an intellectual one were added, women would get even a larger proportion of votes. It is, however, a matter of common knowledge that masculine legislation in its wisdom has not imposed a physical force test as a qualification for voting for Members of Parliament, but only the qualification of owning property or possessing a house. If, therefore, a woman owns or occupies a house, she possesses the one qualification which by law entitles a person to vote, and under these circumstances I venture to think that this argument about force loses its point. Possibly one of Mr. Wason's reasons for denying women a vote is that women do not personally exert executive force and do not bear arms in defence of their country. But even this is fallacious, for, after all, it is a very small proportion of the men of this country who exercise these functions, or who serve in the Army or Navy; and these, not being householders, are precisely those who do not have the elective franchise. In its wisdom the law declares that it is not the soldier who is to have the vote—it is the peaceful citizen who hires the soldier. Women are among these peaceful citi-

zens, and when we pay our rates and taxes we do as much in defence of the country as ninety-nine men out of every hundred who are upon the register. And in addition to this, we perform another service to the State—we bear and bring up all the soldiers. This is a work more painful and physically exhausting than any performed by men; it is also a work entirely unpaid for in money. The soldier is rewarded not only with money, but also with honour; the mother receives neither. And yet, compare for one moment the services that these two render to the State! Men are called upon very occasionally to defend their country; women are called upon daily to replenish its citizens. It is a special prerogative of the man to destroy and to punish human beings; it is the special function of the woman to create, to cherish, to nurture and sustain human life during its whole existence. Surely it is a strange doctrine that all power and honour should be given to that masculine force that makes for destruction, and nothing to that feminine energy which ministers to life. Therefore, in asking the House of Commons to pass that very moderate Suffrage Bill, which after all gives representation to a small number of women, all of whom have a real stake in the country, it cannot be said that we are asking more than is due to women, on the ground of their physical force, or of their intelligence, or of their services to the State.

Mr. Wason ended his speech by invoking the authority of the Scriptures, which in his eyes condemn the Bill by making no allusion to Women's Franchise. But neither do the Scriptures give special sanction to the election of men as Members of Parliament. If Mr. Wason really desires to follow Bible teaching, let him obey the fifth commandment, which enjoins every man to honour his father

and his mother—a commandment which in some conspicuous instances seems to have been lost sight of amongst the younger members of the present Parliament.

MR. MALLET AND WOMEN'S WISHES.

When Mr. Wason resumed his seat, a fresh opponent appeared in the person of Mr. Mallet, who, though apparently a young Member, made a more effective attack upon the Bill. One of his arguments was that women did not want the vote. Can he really think that women do not want the vote? How many times have I stood beside his mother when she advocated the cause of womanhood in crowded, enthusiastic meetings! She, too, was eloquent with the same voice, with the same manner as the youthful Member for Plymouth. Did she think that women wanted the Suffrage? I am sure that she did. And had the honourable Member accompanied his mother to those meetings, without doubt his opinions would have been modified, for no one can follow the agitation in this country, and not know how widespread and how intense is the desire of women for some share in Parliamentary representation.

One reason why Mr. Mallet questioned the desire of women for Suffrage was that petitions for a Women's Suffrage Bill had diminished in number. Whereas in the year 1875 half a million signatures to petitions were presented to the House, in recent years that number had not been reached. He omitted to mention, however, that in 1894 an *appeal* containing 250,000 signatures had been presented, nor did he allude to the signatures of 50,000 women presented in a *declaration* last year. As one of those who assisted in getting up the petitions in 1875, I can throw some light upon the subject. These signatures, which were collected by the various

Suffrage societies, represented much arduous work done by poor women who had nothing to give but their time, and that only at great sacrifice. Some few were undoubtedly paid, but at a rate hardly sufficient to find them in shoe leather. The signatures were most carefully examined by Miss Becker herself, who was very anxious that no handle should be given to scoffers in the House to say the signatures were not genuine. I was present at the debate in the House following the presentation of these petitions, and I complain of the manner in which the House received them. Without one single particle of evidence, and without examination, as the Committee on Petitions had not as yet reported, our opponents said that the petitions had absolutely no influence upon their minds, that the signatures were not fairly collected, and that they did not represent any body of opinion whatsoever. Under these circumstances, I think members will agree that the various committees could hardly ask women to make again such great sacrifices when their efforts appeared to afford only a fresh ground for attack. If, indeed, the House requires petitions—if it is not true that petitions are obsolete as a means of influencing the House (as we have been advised by some of our best Parliamentary supporters)—then we will obtain signatures to petitions; but before Members impose this arduous work, the House should give some guarantee that it will at least examine the petitions, and not condemn them, before examination, on the assumption that they are of a bogus nature. When Members demand proof of the desire of women for the Suffrage, I think in fairness they should give some definite indication of what they would consider proof. Women have collected petitions, and their petitions have been sneered at; they have held huge demonstrations of women

in London, and in most of our large provincial towns — demonstrations so crowded, so enthusiastic that on any other question they would have been regarded as evidence of a sincere and widespread demand. We have held thousands of meetings all over the country, but our efforts have been seriously handicapped by the boycott of the press, which for years refused to give even a single line to the report of our meetings, declined to insert our letters, and usually ignored any notices that were sent. Until the "Suffragettes" adopted their present methods, no interest whatever was taken in the question by the general press. The moment, however, our movement became dramatic—when fighting took place—then, and then only, did journalists begin to clamour for copy. It must not be supposed that in saying this I express approval of all the methods of the "Suffragettes." On the contrary, it has given many women profound pain to see men attacked who have helped us in our efforts to obtain the franchise. But if, indeed, we are not to get the Suffrage without conspicuous agitation, I fail to see to what other methods we can now resort, except to those violent enough to make telling newspaper paragraphs. And one thing is certain—every method we do resort to, of whatever kind, will be made a handle against us by our enemies and used as another excuse for not passing the Women's Suffrage Bill into law.

FALSE ARGUMENTS FROM HISTORY.

Mr. Mallet next made use of another argument, which never appeals in vain to an assembly of men, namely, that they were "bound to weigh objections, which, after all, were rooted in the life and character of the nation and the ancient and universal custom of mankind." This sentiment was received with cheers. If, however, we

examine it more carefully, it will be seen to contain a radical error. In ancient times, kings and queens, lords and ladies, ruled over the common people in all countries. True, the kings and lords had more power than the queens and ladies. Nevertheless, women had a considerable share of power, the abbesses were summoned with other ecclesiastical dignitaries to the old Parliaments, and women heiresses often returned Members of Parliament in the exercise of their territorial privileges. Parliaments in those days did not consider the wishes of constituents, nor regard themselves as delegates for voters as they do at the present time; they did either justice or injustice, according to their ideals of ruling the country, and passed measures which they in their wisdom or unwisdom deemed to be for the general public good. True, the great mass of women had no political power, but their subjection was shared by the great bulk of the men of the country. Now times have changed, and every successive Reform Bill has placed more and more men in the position of rulers, until to-day sees women almost alone in the position of the governed. The interests and needs of constituents have become more and more pressing, and legislation in the interests of women more difficult. This supremacy of sex over sex as it exists to-day has been unknown in the previous history of the Western world. Women hold their liberty and property entirely at the mercy of a legislature which owes its power to the votes of men, and on pain of losing their seats Members are pledged to consider the wishes of those who elect them. What place, what chance of sympathy, has the woman citizen of to-day, and what prospect has she of having reforms carried, or even of obtaining a few hours of attention from the legislature under such conditions? The position is a hopeless one, and more dangerous to the liberties of women than at any previous time in history.

Mr. Mallet also referred to the results of the extension of the franchise to women in other countries. He did not read, as he might in fairness have done, the words of all those politicians in New Zealand and Australia who testify to the success of the enfranchisement of women in these countries. He was pleased to sneer at Finland and at our Colonies as countries whose legislative affairs were of small importance, and his remarks will no doubt be read with considerable pleasure by politicians in those places, and will contribute to the *entente cordiale* which we hope to have with all the nations of the world. Turning to America, he blamed women for what he considered the bad government in Colorado, but as women are not in a majority there, his argument hardly appears in any way damaging to our cause. His remarks about sending out the Suffragettes to Utah by national subscription, if not in the best taste, had nevertheless the effect of amusing the House. The tenor of his main argument amounted to this: Woman is a dangerous animal, and in order to compete with her, man must be protected by the whole machinery of the State. To subject her to his will he must have advantages of inheritance, of State-protected occupation, and of the power of making laws to defend himself from her aggression. He must have all these things, because she is a creature so inferior, so unfitted to take part in the affairs of State, that she is not even worthy to have the small part of political power which this Bill contemplates. Surely these positions are mutually destructive. If man is really superior, really so much stronger, so much wiser, so much cleverer than woman, why does he need these artificial protections? Why does he not come out into the open and compete on equal terms with the adversary he thinks inferior to himself? Is it that he distrusts his own strength and talents? If so, it

is right to get well under cover. But I hasten to assure such timid little men that they have really nothing to fear; that if they would only dare to be generous, if they would only dare to give women equal laws and equal privileges with themselves, they would not find our devotion waver. Nor do I believe they would find our intellects unequal to the task of protecting their rightful interests equally with our own.

THE HOME SECRETARY'S MEMORABLE WORDS.

When Mr. Mallet's lengthy speech came to an end, it was refreshing to see Mr. Gladstone rise to express the sympathetic attitude of the Government towards the Bill before the House; and I think all women will feel grateful for the generous way in which he supported their claims. But he said "he regretted that predominance of argument—and he believed that had been obtained—was not enough to win the political day. For his own part," he continued,—and his words are memorable—"he believed the country would be made better and happier by the admission of women to the franchise. He believed the power to exercise the vote would stimulate the activity of women in a thousand ways, would give them more confidence in themselves, would improve their present *status*, particularly in the industrial world, and open to them new avenues of employment." Mr. Gladstone was speaking, I trust, not only for himself, but on behalf of the Government, and if the Government says that not only would the vote be a benefit to women, not only would it improve their chances of employment, but that it would make the whole country better and happier, surely nothing more remains to be said. Why not carry the Bill into law?

Alas, the House of Commons "has done many just things, but never anything because it was just." Mr. Gladstone explained that the benefits which he believed the country would receive from Women's Suffrage could neither be given by a Prime Minister so kindly and so favourable to the measure as Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, nor by a Cabinet containing a majority of supporters, nor by a House of Commons in which 420 members are friendly. He indicated another path which we must tread—a path so steep, so difficult, that he struck the Gallery with dismay. Mr. Gladstone pointed out that when the great Reform Bills of 1832 and of 1867 were passed great political violence among the disfranchised was needed to enable the Government to make up its mind to electoral reform, and although he deprecated disorder, he made it clear that something of the kind was expected to strengthen the hands of any Government that might undertake to enfranchise women. He admitted that there was a great and growing movement in favour of giving votes to women; but the tale of bricks was not complete. The results of forty years' work and struggle would not suffice; we must do spade-work throughout the country; we must leave our homes, our children, our employment, and go out into the highways and hedges to convert every man and woman in the land. It is not enough to appeal to politicians or to have convinced a majority in the House of Commons; we must convince the agricultural labourer; we must convince the iron-worker; we must convince the loafer. Women of education, graduates of universities, are to tramp round to voters who could, perhaps, hardly read or write, and with a smile on their lips and a stone in their hearts to beg for a share in men's political privileges. Women must wait outside the public house

until Falstaff and Bill Sikes come out together; they must bear the chaff of the one and the brutality of the other.

THE DEMAND FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AGITATION.

This is a task indeed. Men who suggest this spade-work do not know at what cost to women it is done. In the first place, women are miserably poor; the wives of rich men have often nothing but their dress allowance, which they are expected to spend on their own backs. Daughters inherit but small shares of the paternal wealth; half the women of this country work for a wage which a Royal Commission declared to average not more than 1s. per day; married women are busily occupied with their homes and with their children. The exercise of the elective franchise only needs a few hours to record a vote once in every five or six years; but to do spade-work—to carry on political agitation—needs a lifetime of leisure, and is without exception the most exhausting work known to modern life. How often have we tramped along the muddy lanes, how often have we gone round from door to door, often receiving rebuffs and unkindness! Well do we remember dreary railway stations at midnight, the last train gone, and snow upon the ground. And now we are told we have to move not only the towns, not only the villages, but even the hamlets—Mr. Gladstone specially mentioned the hamlets. Many women imagined that to have 420 Members of Parliament on their side meant that all this work was over, meant that we could see the top of the hill. But Mr. Gladstone's speech dashed these hopes. We see before us an endless vista of political agitation under conditions possibly less favourable than at present. Perhaps we may have a Prime Minister not in favour, a Cabinet less kindly dis-

posed, a House filled with another political party less friendly to our claims. I must say I fail to see why this task should be imposed upon us. I do not remember that any such burden was laid on the agricultural labourer when the franchise was extended to him. He did not agitate; he did not tramp round the country converting every elector. Mr. Arch and other sympathisers held a few enthusiastic meetings; but the mass of agricultural labourers—at least, in the district where I resided—did not take any part in the matter at all. They were simply told that the franchise was for their good, and it was granted to them without any effort on their part. I do not understand why an entirely different treatment should be given to women, or why our request, which is acknowledged to be just and for the good of the nation, should be deferred indefinitely, while a political activity is demanded of us compared with which we should feel the treadmill to be a rest.

Another difficulty is to decide where women can work to the best advantage. I need scarcely tell any Member of the House of Commons how strongly Members resent any interference with their constituencies. If, therefore, we work in the constituencies of our friends, we may stir up a certain latent hostility there, and we cannot, of course, have more than these members' votes. If we work in the constituency of a known enemy, every expression of sympathy which we obtain there only adds to the bitterness of the sitting Member. If again we take the constituency of a man who is fairly neutral, it is an even chance whether he becomes a friend or an opponent. Take for illustration the case of Lord James of Hereford. In 1873 he (then Sir Henry James) was hard-pressed by the women of

Taunton to promise his vote and support for the Suffrage Bill. In a speech made in Taunton, he said: "There are a great many lady householders in Taunton, and if half of them appeal to me to support female suffrage, I will do so." Taunton contained 562 women householders, and a petition signed by 300 of these, praying for the Parliamentary vote, was forwarded to Sir Henry James, reminding him of his pledge. Sir Henry James is reported to have said, on receiving the petition, that he had never cared much about the question of Women's Suffrage, but now that his constituency had been stirred up by meddlesome women, he would always oppose it. And oppose it he did. Never was there a more aggressive or effective enemy than Sir Henry James. In every debate he spoke from the front bench, usually last, scattering our friends and rallying the enemy to more vigorous effort, and his bitter and unworthy attacks live vividly in our recollections.

For many years the policy of the Women's Suffrage Society and of the Women's Liberal Federation has been to avoid any action which would tend to irritate Members of Parliament, and to neglect no opportunity of securing their goodwill, with the result to-day that we have a large number of the House of Commons pledged to support us, and in the last division only 92 were found ready to vote against. But there is grave danger that the very ardour amongst women which is awakened by our campaign may intimidate Members and rouse their animosity to our enfranchisement. In spite, therefore, of the friendliness with which Mr. Gladstone spoke of the aspirations of women, and his sympathy with their cause, a profound gloom settled on the Ladies' Gallery when he resumed his seat.

IRISH COURTESY.

The next speaker in opposition to the Bill was Sir W. Nugent, who returned to the charge that women do not want the vote, and appealed to the House not to force it upon them. But Members would do well to remember that the granting of the Suffrage to women does not carry with it any obligation to record a vote. No woman would fail to regard it as a compliment to be invited to take part in the councils of the nation. It would undoubtedly be an inducement to her to study political questions, and it would help her to bear those sacrifices which she is compelled to make in the interests of the State, by the assurance that her opinions are not entirely ignored. And there is no doubt that if ever this country is to be flooded by a wave of that patriotic feeling which makes possible great sacrifices for the general good, such a spirit must be learned by men and women alike at their mother's knee, and it must be the outcome of the universal voice of the citizens of this country. For the rest, the speech of Sir Walter Nugent, though in opposition to the measure, was marked by that courtesy which is characteristic of Irish members. In the many debates I have heard on subjects connected with women, never do I remember a single taunt or wounding jest or insult spoken from the Irish benches, and I can well believe that in an Irish Parliament votes for women would not be quite so eagerly demanded.

PROPERTY QUALIFICATION—FOR MEN ONLY!

A very different opponent next rose, all the more insidious because he masked his opposition to this Bill under the pretence of friendliness to Women's Suffrage. Sir Maurice Levy prides himself not only on being a Liberal, but on being a Radical of an advanced type.

Now, the first article of faith for Liberals is *Trust in the people*, and the promotion of Government "*by the people for the people*." To secure the adequate representation of all classes of men has been the great work of Liberals in the past, and they are never tired of boasting of a free England and the liberties of its citizens. Now what are the facts? To-day this country is governed by an oligarchy of less than half its citizens, and yet one class only is entirely excluded—namely, women. When, therefore, a measure is brought forward which would enfranchise even a small number of women, one would have thought that any man with Liberal tendencies would have welcomed such an improvement in our constitution. Sir Maurice Levy, however, Radical as he is, both speaks and votes against the measure. His objection to the Bill lies in the fact that it would allow women to vote on the property qualification, which is to-day one of the few qualifications recognised by law. He is not ashamed to vote himself on a property qualification; he is not ashamed to be voted for by men who have only a property qualification; but the idea of any women voting on a property qualification is an abomination in his eyes. He knows perfectly well that the only Bill that has a chance of passing in the House of Commons to-day is a Bill which simply extends *existing* electoral qualifications to women, and that, therefore, to oppose the property qualification for women is the best method of preventing them from getting anything. His contention that a measure giving a vote to women householders would exclude the greater part of the women of this country is, unfortunately, true; but, after all, the fact that it does not enfranchise the whole female population at once, is the very fact that makes it possible to pass the Bill at all. The women who would be enfranchised are householders in their own right, who pay taxes

directly, and bear alone the burdens and obligations of citizens. If at some time in the future it should be possible to give the whole of the women of this country the elective franchise, no doubt that would be a more complete measure of justice; but it is a poor excuse to weep crocodile tears and deny any share of Government to women who possess all the legal qualification for a vote, on the ground that women who do *not* possess that qualification will still remain excluded.

When Sir Maurice Levy spoke of the "tender and humane thought" with which the House treated questions regarding women, he was evidently trying to win Members' ears by flattery. The House received his compliments with a modest silence. Tender and humane feeling towards women is not cultivated in legislative assemblies, and if it exists at all it speaks in vain to men intoxicated with dominion over the whole world of womanhood. Sir Maurice Levy stated that "in his judgment there was no question of unfairness towards women in matters of legislation." He could not say this unless he had omitted to inform himself of facts, for he would not willingly mislead the House. Indeed, if he is not aware of any legal injustice to women he must have passed much of his existence in the realms of fancy.

He further said that "if the legislation already passed by the House was considered, no one would say that it had ever had the character of legislation by sex against sex." If Sir Maurice Levy had never yet heard anyone say so, I say it now. If it has not before been mentioned in his hearing, it is because it is too obvious to need remark. Number One naturally comes first in the House of Commons as in other assemblies; and there has never been an Act affecting the interests of women passed by the House of Commons that has not borne the unmistakable

stamp of sex legislation. Not only has Parliament repeatedly refused to remedy laws inflicting injustice on women, but in my recollection fresh injustices have been imposed. When the Divorce Law was passed, Mr. Gladstone himself told the House "that it introduced a new and great injustice to women in favour of men." I heard Sir Horace Davey (afterwards Lord Davey) bring into the House his Bill for making the father and mother jointly the guardians of their children. The debate which followed had all the worst features of sex antagonism, and Sir Horace Davey's motion found only nineteen supporters in the division lobby. The clause to allow a dying mother to appoint a guardian to act jointly with the father was rejected, though a father himself retained that right. The House has not paused to consider the feelings of women, or to ascertain their wishes in many Acts affecting their liberties, their properties or their persons, and if this agitation for Women's Suffrage is characterised by peculiar violence, it is because the sex antagonism in the House of Commons to the interests of women is bitterly felt and resented. Nor can it be said that the attitude of Sir Maurice Levy, either in his constituency or in the House, has done anything to diminish the keenness of this antagonism.

TO COLONEL LOCKWOOD: WHY WOMEN WANT VOTES.

It was a very unusual pleasure to the Ladies' Gallery to hear the speech of so sympathetic an opponent as Colonel Lockwood. Here, at last, is the ideal enquirer whom the advocates of Women's Suffrage have so long desired and have hitherto failed to meet. They have combated in the past prejudices, illogical arguments, sex antagonism, misplaced idealism; but courteous sympathetic enquirers with open minds have been rare. Colonel Lock-

wood desired to know what practical benefit would come to women from the possession of the vote, and it is largely owing to his kindly invitation to state the case that I have been encouraged to write this pamphlet.

Women desire a vote primarily because the laws are not just to them. They desire (to select a few instances) alteration in the marriage laws, in the laws concerning the guardianship of children, in the laws which concern infant life, in the laws of inheritance, and, above all, a voice in the many questions which affect the work of the labouring women of this country. No less than half the women of this country are now earning their own bread by their own labour, and they hold their employments at the mercy of the House of Commons. That House is composed of men, everyone of whom owes his seat to the votes of working men, some of whom compete, or desire to compete, in the trades employing women. Now women do not work for the pleasure of working, but because they are hungry and have to be fed, and no one offers to feed them. Many of these women have parents or children dependent upon their exertions. We feel it very dangerous, and not advantageous to the State, to have the employment of these women and the conditions of their labour entirely regulated by a body of men who may be jealous of them and hostile to their employment. The constituency is very jealous of its rights, and as every class of men is represented, there is a scramble for time for every possible kind of measure. Under these circumstances, the affairs of women have a poor chance of getting a fair hearing in the first place, or, in the second, of having a just solution agreed to. I do not speak unadvisedly; there are political questions affecting women I have felt an interest in and watched for the last thirty years, but which it is impossible to advance in

the House of Commons under present conditions. The position of a class to-day which is not enfranchised is a pitiable one; it is like a ship becalmed at sea, with no breath of wind to stir its sails, while steamers armed with power hurry to and fro, reach their goals and return again. In former years the mere mention in the House of any question relating to women was often received with a burst of absolutely indecent merriment. Now we are told there is no time to place at our disposal. If friendly Members do take up a question relating to women, we have the sorrow of feeling that it is likely to be a disadvantage to them in their political career. Their constituencies are not altogether pleased, for time is occupied which it is considered should be devoted to the interests of the electors. Perhaps one of the bitterest things to women in their present condition is to feel that the advocacy of this question is a handicap to those men who so generously take it up, while women are unable by a single vote to reward the devotion of their friends. In previous years much was talked about the great value of the indirect influence of women, but women feel that that indirect influence is a bad influence. It means that women have to wheedle those in power, instead of employing the direct honest method of voting at the poll. Perhaps Colonel Lockwood would also consider how very little the Bill asks. It simply asks that a few women should be enfranchised. It does not seek to confer upon women a majority of votes, nor does it give them the right to sit in the House of Commons. It gives them a share in the representation of the country which carries with it the right to address Members of Parliament on questions vital to women's interests, without being considered aggressive bores. It gives them some power to protect their property and liberty from measures which may be contem-

plated by the ruling sex, a sex which cannot be said to have been in the past either just or friendly to women in the matter of legislation. One immediate advantage would result which many would regard as of moment. It would do away with the conviction in the minds of women that men are to-day deliberately and consciously unjust to them. Feminine discontent is like the lump of leaven, which the woman in Scripture hid in the three measures of barley meal until the whole lump was leavened. This sense of injustice spreads from mind to mind with marvellous rapidity, producing a sex antagonism which brings sorrow with it, to men perhaps, and certainly to women. Man, after all, is their appointed companion, and when they can't quite like him the salt of life is gone. When David danced before the Ark, and the King's daughter looking out from a window "despised him in her heart," it was probably the bitterest moment of her life. Could she only have admired the grace of her David she might have been a happy woman even in the long ago.

Finally, women want the Suffrage because they love their country, and would gladly help to make it a better and happier place for the children who come after. But women can never do effective work until they are armed with power. A nation ruled by men alone is like a bird which tries to fly with one wing bound—it rises, flutters, and falls again to earth. Dare to unbind that wing and have patience till it gains strength, then men and women will rise together and lift humanity to heights before unknown.

A SUGGESTION TO MR. CLEM EDWARDS.

Mr. Edwards rose to oppose the Bill in order to take this opportunity of rendering a service to men-voters who returned him, by pointing out that justice to women might possibly involve some small curtailment of men's

overwhelming power. He stated that if a man living in a house rated under £20 were obliged to recognise his wife as a joint householder, £10 apiece would not entitle either of them to the vote; therefore, because of this infinitesimal number of men who might possibly be placed at a disadvantage, all the women of the country should be prevented from having a share in the Government. This attitude is entirely typical of the House of Commons whenever the interests of women are considered on any subject. The question always is—Shall I suffer for it? Will any man suffer for it? If so, away with it! I suggest to Mr. Edwards's acute mind that he might find some way of preventing the disastrous result which he has discovered by formulating some clause under which fully qualified women might be enfranchised, without taking a single iota from the privileges of the opposite sex. If he would support the Bill, and suggest some such qualifying clause, he would be able to prove that his loyalty to his constituents was not a mere excuse to cover hostility to women. It is not every man to-day who opposes Women's Suffrage who is honest enough to say, as the late Lord Ritchie once said: "I admit all the arguments are on their side, but I shall not vote for a Woman's Franchise Bill because I personally do not want it." Some excuse is usually given; but underlying that excuse you will probably find that sex-antagonism of which Sir Maurice Levy has never yet heard.

SIR WILLIAM CREMER ONCE MORE.

After Mr. Edwards, Sir William Cremer rose to deliver his inevitable and time-worn speech to a resigned House. The Ladies' Gallery prepared themselves to endure a repetition of the class of observations which have characterised his former speeches on this question. For

once, however, he addressed himself to argument. He was pleased to say that very few women wanted the Suffrage, and that the one or two who did behaved like a stage army, trying to simulate a mighty host. Perhaps he was thinking of the members of his Biennial Inter-Parliamentary Congress. I would, however, like to hear Sir William Cremer's definition of "a few." At the present day practically all the women politicians of the Liberal Party, and a very large number of those belonging to the other parties, are in favour of the Suffrage, and this numbers an army of such proportions that no stage or building in the world could hold it; in the Women's Liberal Federation alone there are 80,000 women who have passed unanimous resolutions in favour of Women's Suffrage, and these are but a fringe of the immense number of women in the country who sympathise with this movement. In Sir William Cremer's opinion, even if women were not unfitted by intellect to be Members of Parliament, yet that assembly should be one of men, and men alone. I have no objection to a Parliament of men as long as they are just men, and it is likely that their sense of justice would be kept more active by some women constituents. But though we have heard much discussion about whether women are or are not fit to have a vote, the House has never seriously discussed whether men, and men alone, ought to trust themselves to legislate for women. There has never been a Parliament of men, at any time, in any country, who have made just laws for women; and if all Members of Parliament shared the opinions of Sir William Cremer, the lot of women would be a hard one. And in saying this I feel sure that the sympathy of many members of the House of Commons will be with me. There are generous men in the House to whom the idea of women shut up in

a cage, absolutely helpless, a mark for the unworthy attacks of the member for Haggerston, has been revolting, and they would acknowledge that his conduct would be impossible in the case of any member whose constituency contained even a small number of women voters.

Sir William Cremer had yet another argument to urge upon the House. He considered that the laws of this country treated women with undue leniency, and he was prepared with a list of such instances of favouritism which he proceeded to read to the House. Almost without exception, these were instances of the failures of lawyers to subordinate the old doctrine of coverture to the new conditions of the Married Woman's Property Acts. They were in no case privileges that had been sought for by women, nor were they of any advantage to women as a whole. They were simply a few legal confusions which I would very gladly see altered, together with all the remains of the old law of coverture. Most of Sir William Cremer's so-called privileges are not only disadvantages in themselves, but also a serious danger when used as an excuse by men to keep unjust advantages of greater moment.

OF WOMEN'S LEGAL "PRIVILEGES."

What were these privileges which Sir William Cremer accused us of enjoying? The first was that although a son could be forced by law to pay to the guardians a pauper's maintenance for his parents, no such legal liability was incurred by a daughter. This was enacted, not in favour to women, but because it was assumed she would not have any property. Now can anyone seriously contend that women as a whole obtain any advantage under this law? I believe that the number of

daughters in this country who voluntarily support their parents is in excess of the number of sons doing so. Sons marry and have children of their own to keep; but innumerable daughters work for their parents and support them out of their earnings. I believe there is hardly a woman, however poor, in the country who would allow her father and mother to go to the workhouse while she was able to maintain them. If indeed such a creature exists, it is only fit and proper that she should be punished, and women would unite in the wish that this pauper's maintenance which she has grudged to give should be taken from her by law. Yet Members of Parliament actually regard this defective law which they have themselves made, as an excuse for voting against a Bill enfranchising women!

Another point which Sir William Cremer urged was, that although the wife could pledge the credit of her husband with tradespeople, a husband could not similarly pledge the credit of his wife. In considering this it must not be forgotten that the law which makes a husband support his wife and children, enforces a precisely similar obligation upon her, although by law the children are not hers, but entirely his. As for pledging his credit, the wife is in exactly the same position as a servant. A cook and a coachman can pledge their master's credit, just as a wife can. The law was simply made for the protection of tradesmen who supply the house, and as long as the articles ordered have been paid for before by the master, and are suitable to the style of the house, the tradesman is presumed to be giving credit to the master of the house, and all such goods when delivered remain his property. On the other hand, the master of the house cannot pledge the credit of any of his servants, or of his wife, because they are supposed to be

dependent persons with no assets. In giving credit directly to the husband, the tradesman does not consider him in the light of an agent, nor does he expect wives or servants to defray the master's bill. Personally I have always been of opinion that the subtleties of lawyers concerning the liabilities of married women with regard to debts are a great disadvantage to women in their capacity as traders, as their disabilities seriously limit their credit. The laws quoted by Sir William Cremer have evidently not been enacted in sympathy with women, but solely by error or confusion of thought, and in my opinion they afford absolutely no ground for the often repeated assertion that woman is a privileged person. What he showed by his speech was that the married woman has been in the past by law the husband's chattel, acting only by his authority, and that she bears to-day the traces of these chains.

WOMEN'S LEGAL DISABILITIES.

So far from women possessing privileges, as Sir William Cremer asserts, it is man who, as son, husband and father, has taken advantages to himself on questions of property. Consider one instance alone—the Law of Intestacy. When a husband dies without a will his real property goes to his eldest son, and the wife is turned out of the ancestral home. Of his personal property only a half to one-third is hers. But when a wife who is possessed of real property dies without a will, the law, so quick to sympathise with man, gives the whole of this real property to her husband for his life, and all her personal property becomes his absolutely, to the exclusion of children. If the son or daughter dies intestate, the father inherits the whole of the property of such son or daughter to the exclusion of the mother, and even if the father is not

alive, the male heir-at-law of his father, possibly his grandfather or his uncle, inherits in preference to the mother. She is excluded from such inheritance until the male line is exhausted. This is only one out of many instances of unjust laws under which women are treated as step-children of the State, whose claims to property and honour are postponed to those of man's chief favourite—himself. Where men and women are equal is before the taxgatherer, in the dock, and on the scaffold—equal only in punishment, not in privilege.

The last opponent was Mr. Rees, who last year talked the Bill out, and whose speech on this occasion was not sympathetically received by the House. Nor did it contain anything not previously touched upon, except the time-honoured disrespectful allusion to "petticoat Government." I might perhaps remind him that articles of dress, whether worn by men or women, have nothing to do with Government, and that "petticoat government" has no more meaning than "stiff collar government," or "cylinder hat government." The phrase is used to rouse contempt, without serious argument behind it. Acts of Parliament are produced, not by clothing, but by minds, and if the minds of women are sufficiently strong to understand their own interests, the employment of those minds on the problems of government will tend to make its machinery more perfect, and so secure greater justice, and therefore greater happiness, to the citizens of this country. I heard some allusion to the daughters of Zion and "tinkling ornaments"; but as the daughters of Zion never had the franchise, and as tinkling ornaments have long gone out of fashion, the remarks of Mr. Rees appeared to have but a remote bearing on the subject at issue.

THE MEMBERS' PRAYER.

On the motion for the closure and subsequent division, Mr. Stanger's Bill passed its second reading by 279 to 92 votes. The *Times* in a leader next morning commented on this as a "startling majority," but what is even more startling is the absence from the division of 141 members out of 420 who promised their support to the measure. The prevalence of influenza is no doubt startling also, but I doubt if it quite accounts for the number of the absent. Our friends and opponents both assure us that there is no possibility of the Bill going further, and I think this is a matter of peculiar hardship. There is, however, no doubt that the House of Commons as a whole—very naturally, perhaps—regards this question with a certain personal dislike, either shown openly or veiled with arguments more or less unsound. It is, after all, no light thing to ask a privileged class to share its privileges with another class which has been considered inferior. The landlords were not so ready to admit the commercial classes to a share of power, nor were the commercial electors eager to admit the labourers to the poll. But the difficulties of these various classes of men in securing the franchise were as nothing compared with the difficulties that women will have to encounter. For, after all, men sympathise much with one another, whereas their primitive feeling towards woman as a whole is to dominate, to crush, to cheapen her both in the matrimonial and labour market. This feeling which runs through all classes of mankind is never more odious than when it is manifested in the legislative Chamber, for I venture to believe that members of such a Chamber recognise, in theory at any rate, that they owe as trustees special care for the interests of those persons who are not directly represented. So far from giving their whole attention to the electors—who are able

to look after themselves — one would expect them to regard the interests of those who are not represented as a sacred trust, not to be settled by the indulgence of their primitive masculine instincts, but by an unselfish consideration of the principles of justice. In suggesting this I hope it will be thoroughly understood that women have never asked for the slightest legal or social advantage—they have merely asked to be placed on an equal footing, and that even if they are in some respects weaker than men, they should be given not more, but only equal protection and equal rights. In a House where members pray daily that they may be led to lay aside "all private interests, prejudices, and partial affections," we cannot but wonder that more conscientious effort to realise this ideal has not accompanied their plea for grace.

THE UNHAPPINESS OF WOMEN.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that not one speaker in the debate touched on the great problems of womanhood to-day, and the failure of masculine legislation to deal with the evils of that present system which is responsible for much misery amongst our sex. If you consider the position of women of the upper classes you find that though they are often reared in luxury, comparatively few of them inherit large fortunes. Estates are entailed upon eldest sons, younger sons are provided for—some at the expense of the nation by receiving posts—while others take a large share of the family property, and daughters have usually to be contented with a much scantier patrimony. Indeed, it is in the power of their father to leave them absolutely nothing. Social laws permit them neither to dig nor to beg. Many must, therefore, either make a wealthy marriage or sink into the melancholy position of

poor relations without means to keep up the state to which they are accustomed. In marriage they have often no real choice of a life partner, nor do men always need to win their love or respect in order to possess them. Accordingly unhappiness is frequently their lot. To such women a share equal to that of their brothers of the paternal inheritance would be an inestimable boon, and an assimilation of our laws in this respect to the laws of France would give complete justice.

In the middle class we find that daughters enjoy a larger share of the paternal wealth. Many of them inherit from their fathers a considerable mental activity which fails to find adequate fields for its energies. Thousands are bitterly conscious of the emptiness of their lives, which social engagements and frivolities never really fill. Others crowd into philanthropic work, and there is keen competition amongst them to be allowed to perform menial and revolting work in hospitals. They even wash the feet of suffering humanity gladly. If only the Government would make it easy for such women to engage in useful and necessary public service—service to which some definite honour would attach—a band of workers might be raised willing and able to accomplish much of that unpaid social labour so greatly needed in this country. Untrained, alone, and without encouragement, they achieve little but the record of charitable work. Trained, united, honoured, and armed with legal power, they might accomplish great reforms.

In worse case are the poor married women, and the lot of many evokes profound pity. From the cradle upwards girls are taxed beyond their strength with the care of the younger children and the household. When they leave school, it is nobody's business to teach them the arts of housewifery and motherhood, or, on the other hand, to

train them in any branch of skilled labour. The State, which spends large sums over the training of boys for the Navy and other positions, spends practically nothing on the training of its womanhood after the elementary school time is over. The technical schools, which women are taxed to support, have regulations which practically exclude all but male students. The girl's choice is usually some unskilled occupation bringing in starvation wages, or marriage. The working girl often marries very young, and it is impossible to contemplate the result of these unions without a feeling of consternation, for nearly half the children born of such marriages perish before they are five years old. Many of the tables give the death-rate as one quarter or one-third of the children born, varying, of course, with different localities; but as this takes no account of the number of still-born children, of whose death the nation keeps no record, I think I am not wrong in saying that nearly half the children perish.

The bearing of these children doomed only to die, weakens the mother, and produces that maternal exhaustion which is considered by medical authorities the chief cause of infant mortality. Grief and sickness overcome the energies of the wife, the home falls into disorder, and physical degeneration of the nation results. There is no sadder picture on earth than that of the exhausted mother, one baby in her arms, and other children clinging round her knees pining for the food she cannot give them. Physical and mental pain together engulf her. Her sole hope is in her husband, and if he fail her she is lost. Most men love their wives and children, and do much to serve them; but they love themselves also, and many love themselves best. We should never forget that the laws give men absolute power over the lives of these helpless women, and if they

waste or perish from excessive child-birth, their husbands incur no legal responsibility. No law directly compels the father to work for wife or children, nor can the wife herself claim from his employer any part of his earnings. Whatever treatment the husband gives her, however brutal, short of criminal violence, she must bear it. The record of cruelty to wives which appears in police-courts is appalling, and the sentences passed on such men as are convicted are acknowledged to be a national scandal. Separation orders only touch the fringe of all this suffering, as the threat that he will emigrate to America where no English law can reach him, and leave his wife and children to the workhouse, gives the husband a potent weapon to enforce a wife's submission.

The recent researches into poverty for which the nation is indebted to Booth and Rowntree, show that in nearly every working-class home there is a time about the birth of the second child when the line of poverty dips lower than at any other period of life. A little help, a little luck, a little keener devotion in the husband, or strength in the wife, and that family—dropping, perhaps, a small coffin or two on its way—emerges again into normal conditions. On the other hand, a little extra misfortune, or a little self-indulgence on the part of either parent, and that household sinks in ruin. Such parents and their children crowd our workhouses, hospitals, and prisons with undesirable inmates who are unable to earn an honest living, and who remain a burden upon the resources of the country.

WOMEN AND THE NATION.

It is not only for the sake of mothers that this question presses. There are not wanting signs of decadence in our nation. The eyes of political reformers are turned to-day towards the setting sun of human life; they propose to

pour out our national wealth to gladden its last years with comfort; while in the chill dawn of life the fair buds wither before they open, the flower of womanhood is trampled in the dust. The country's gold is not for them. A birth-rate ever falling is a writing on the wall which every nation must read, and reading, either repent or perish. For if the birth-rate is falling, the death-rate amongst children is not falling, but tends to rise. Without counting those who do not survive their birth, 120,000 other children annually die. Their pretty forms are carried in endless procession, bathed in mothers' tears, to fill our graveyards with corruption. This waste of life is draining the vital forces of our country—sapping that maternal energy which is a nation's greatest riches, and which alone can give an imperial future to our race.

If this be the lot of married mothers, what can we say of the treatment dealt to women who have illegitimate children, and particularly to those who in madness, pain or shame abandon their children and leave them to perish? All the masculine governments of the world will fail to convince a woman that her new-born child is not still a part of herself over which she has sole and exclusive rights. Such ignorance should, of course, be punished; but what justice is that under which the police drag such a girl, often almost a child, into a court of law entirely administered by men (probably sinners themselves) where a Judge in a black cap tells her that she is to be hanged by the neck until she be dead? Such sentences are usually commuted, but in any case the girl's chance is gone, and a lifelong expiation is her lot.

"Mais l'amant, mais le père, ô Justice éternelle,
Pourquoi n'est-il pas là, flétri, brisé comme elle?
S'est-il du noir cachot évadé par hasard?
Non. Il est au café comme à son ordinaire.
Quand il aura fini de jouer au billard
Il prendra le journal et lira cette affaire."

What care, what interest, has our House of Commons ever taken in these matters? The well-being of mothers appears to come absolutely last in national consideration; a result natural enough amongst a people ruled by one sex alone, and that the sex which has ever found its chief interest in war and commerce. Man never will and never can solve the problems of the nation's life. This is woman's work, and he must call on her to help him by giving her the Parliamentary Franchise.

The position of women who do not marry, but are thrown upon their own resources to earn a living, is also a grave one. The number of these is enormous—about one-half of all the adult women in the country, and thousands of these work at sweated trades for wages insufficient to support healthy life. Years have gone by since Hood drew attention to these evils, but the woman clothed "in unwomanly rags" still "sings the song of a shirt." The evils of sweating amongst women are mainly due to the fact that they have never had proper industrial training, but are unskilled workers, competing passionately with one another in the few trades open to them. It is also a fact that the regulations of men's Trades Unions only permit women to engage in certain trades, and those for the most part unskilled and badly paid trades, where the wages are in many cases insufficient to tempt men to turn them out.

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO LABOUR, AND THE LAW.

Now, the methods of the House of Commons in dealing with these problems is characteristic. These women have but one barrier against destitution—one valuable asset—namely, their right to labour. And yet the House keeps on legislating to diminish the value of that asset, by imposing regulations, fines, and restrictions on those who employ

women. Factory enactments that concern public health are beneficial in themselves, but why not give also to those men who work at the same or similar trades the benefit of such improved conditions? The law would not then make it the interest of employers to engage men instead of women. There are many cases in which Parliament has forbidden certain occupations to women altogether, and members often do not observe that when they turn women out of an employment that they think unsuitable for her, they are simply indulging their own sense of what is becoming *at her expense*. If the woman had had the choice of a cleaner, healthier trade, she would have taken it before. She chose the best she knew of, and when that best is forbidden by law, she falls back on a second best. She does not receive anything; something is taken away. Parliament does not find other work for such a woman, nor has it ever offered her any money compensation. It is our Licensed Victuallers, when their trade is made a subject of legislation, who receive money compensation, but not our working women. It is cruel for the law to say a woman shall not work, and not to say how she shall be fed. The only fair plan would be either to give women free trade in labour and allow them to take any work whatever that may be offered, or to state what trades are suitable, and to give women a monopoly of such trades. If women may not work in mines, why should men be allowed to paint teacups? If women are not to be allowed to sell drink to men, why should men be allowed to sell ribbons to women? Why should men fit on women's boots and gloves, and be permitted to dress ladies' hair? The present system is terrible, where woman alone is tied fast by law, while her only safeguard and treasure is stolen, namely, her right to work. Members interfere freely with women's occupation even when they do

not forbid them. This pamphlet cannot be printed by women printers because women may work only from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., or from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and so cannot print anything wanted quickly. We do not desire that anyone should work longer hours. But why not permit women to work in relays, one shift say from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m.; another shift say from 4 p.m. to 12 p.m.? Actresses who amuse men are allowed to work at night. Why not women printers? But no, men printers are against us. They alone have the members' ears. They dictate, by law, when and how and where their rivals in the trade shall earn their bread. Thus working women stand to-day with a sea of destitution all round them; their power to labour is like a little strip of sand on which they crowd together, working with incessant toil for a bare life. And every now and then man's laws sweep away first one bit of that sand, and then another, while the women crowd closer and work harder. What will become of them? No one knows or cares. More legislation is threatened which may involve thousands of women in disaster. Men think it is their interest to make women cheap. What wonder women fall in thousands and win in shame the bread denied to labour? Such is the result of man's "protection," the outcome of his "tender and humane feelings" towards women. First he takes away by law both food and liberty, then he thrusts her into outer darkness.

THE NECESSITY FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE.

In the animal world we see the female able to seek food as freely as the male. Even the tiger permits his mate to hunt in the same jungle. It is not hunger that compels the bird to listen to her mate who comes to woo with brightest plumage and with sweetest song. How unlike man, who with the key of the larder safely

in his pocket can, in love, disdain the arts! The hen bird helps to build the nest, and should mischance befall her mate the mother bird can leave the home and bring food from afar to feed her young ones and herself. She has that priceless boon, *an economic independence*. O economic independence, goal of woman's hopes, sole guardian of her liberty, her one sure chance of safety!—it is for this and not for mastery that women strive. We want a world where every woman must be won and where there are no women to be bought. Rather than stoop to loveless marriage, we claim the right to support ourselves in decent comfort by our own labour, labour trained and directed so as to be of value. So long as any woman cannot obtain by either inheritance or labour an economic independence, so long will she remain the helpless prey of fate and man. To-day the mass of women are not happy. When we are born, our mothers drop tears upon our faces as if to ask our pardon for bringing us into a world so full of pain and sorrow; they know ours will be the shadier path, the heavier burden, the greater danger. The frail bark of woman's life tosses helplessly upon the ocean, and the whole earth is strewn with wreckage. The grief of countless thousands fills the air like the moaning of a distant sea, unheard or disregarded by ears accustomed to it; but when once caught this sad refrain is ever present with the hearer, and rouses a strange unrest, and an agitation which will grow and grow until that sound is hushed.

It would be useless to deny that the lot of man also is frequently unhappy, but however unfortunate he may be, there is always one in a worse case. Woman is more helpless, less free, more tender, and for her a more dreadful abyss is ready. In every trouble man has had one faithful friend, ever ready to bind his wounds, to cheer him with her devotion, and comfort him with her pity. But woman too

often finds her worst enemy at her own hearth and board, and her life's companion ready to exploit her for his own selfish interest, to climb up on her shoulders to paths of pleasure and ambition, and then to burn her soul with scorn for being what he himself has made her. Against domestic tyranny, political power is women's only shield, and economic independence her solitary fortress. If any would give help let them believe that the first step is to obtain for women a small share, at least, of the elective franchise. To make great changes, woman must have a weapon suited to her needs—that force which has in the past had power to free the slave and raise the serf; that force which by its breath can right old wrongs and sweep away injustice; that force which has curbed the pride of kings and hushed the insolence of nobles. This only can help women now. They ask to be allowed to lay a guiding hand upon the legislative power which rules the future welfare of this nation.

WOMEN'S NEEDS AND WOMEN'S VOTES.

I have touched at some length on these problems, in the hope of showing that women approach them from a different standpoint to that taken up by men. However desirous men may be to deal justly with the law affecting women, men alone can never realise women's needs and wishes. It is, therefore, necessary to the complete happiness of any nation that both sexes should have an influence over its Government. There are many men in this country who make the welfare of women of their family a first consideration. But all should remember that in the time of slavery in America before 1865 thousands of masters petted their slaves like children and attended carefully to their needs. This, however, did not prevent the terrible wrongs permitted by law

from being inflicted by less scrupulous owners. So with men to-day. It is not enough to be kind to women, to protect them. We ask men to part with power in order to enable women to *protect themselves*, not only against poverty, cruelty and injustice, but against their chief oppressor—man himself.

In Knight's English History the following passage describes the condition of the Catholics in our country before their Emancipation Bill was passed in 1828: "Their legal disabilities occasioned incalculable suffering in their social relations—legal degradation being always an invitation to the baser part of society to inflict insult and privation, which cannot be retaliated." Now, this is the women's case to-day in a nutshell. The law declares them inferior to men, and social disadvantages not enjoined by law naturally follow. The fact that men rule over women by law, makes the brutal man feel somehow within his right when he kicks his wife. The legislature says he is superior to her, and when he eats beefsteak and his wife and children lick the plates and eat potatoes, he thinks this is only what is fitting. The fixed idea, that a woman does not require money or honours, and that her well-being is of less importance than that of man, is the guiding principle of society to-day. It begins in the nursery where a girl suffers from domineering brothers; continues when an inferior education is given her; it rewards her with less money than a man for the same work; appoints to her a subordinate place in marriage, and follows her to the day of death, when the "relict" of "the late John So-and-So" is committed to the tomb. Now that the Catholics are emancipated, their perfect social equality is admitted by all. Who hears them complain now of social insults? Emancipate women by giving them the electoral franchise, and for them also social justice and consideration will follow.

It is useless for members to offer to reform to-day those special laws inflicting injustice upon women. That is not enough. Never shall we be contented under their dominion, never shall we agree to remain at the mercy of their power, and never shall we cease to regard their rule as a usurpation of our just rights.

Women have been pleading forty years for the Parliamentary Franchise, and they feel that, though friendly words are sweet, nothing but actual legislation is of any real use. It is absurd for members to say the House cannot pass Mr. Stanger's Bill this Session. They mean it will not. If 420 members in favour of it insisted on having a day on which to take the Committee stage, the Bill would certainly pass. When members say it cannot go further, they mean it cannot go further without possibly (not probably) affecting adversely their own interests in the constituencies, or the interests of the party, or the interests of other legislation desired by the electors. They are willing to play the part of the Good Samaritan, but unfortunately require the ass, the oil and the twopence for their own use. They practically say to women as was said of old to the woman from Canaan, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." And she answered meekly, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." After all, we are only asking for a few hours out of a session extending over many months. Why will not the House of Commons answer, "O woman, be it unto thee even as thou wilt?"

NOW!

Earnestly women plead that the time to pass the Bill is *now*—now when we have so large a majority of members in favour of the measure—now when the Prime Minister is

with us—now when from the front bench of a strong Government in power it has been declared that "the country would be made happier and better by the admission of women to the franchise."

March, 1908.



30837

**END OF
TITLE**